

# The Analysis of Interlingual and Intralingual Grammatical Errors due to First Language Interference among Diploma Students

Nasiha Nasrudin<sup>1</sup>, Nurhafaiza Mohd Akhir<sup>2\*</sup>, Muhammad Nasiruddin Aziz<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

\*corresponding author: <sup>2</sup>nurhafaiza@uitm.edu.my

## ABSTRACT

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*This study seeks to identify the errors in writing made by Malay ESL students that can be attributed to mother tongue interference. The content analysis of 29 academic compositions in the form of expository essays written by UiTM Puncak Perdana diploma students was conducted. Students were required to produce 250-300 word essays on the effects of procrastination on students within an hour and a half without using any outside resources, such as dictionaries or class notes. The mean word count of the 29 compositions was 305. Based on the findings, it can be said that the reason why the students made the errors was due to inter and intra-lingual mistakes. This paper presents and discusses a descriptive analysis of the results with respect to three main types of interference: the use of singular and plural nouns, subject-verb agreement, and the copula 'be'.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia has undergone substantial transformations in numerous fields ever since attaining its independence in 1957. Multiple languages are spoken in Malaysia, which is a multilingual country. Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the official language, which is the language used in government, education, and media. As a second language, English is widely spoken and used in Malaysia, particularly in urban areas and in business and academic contexts. Many Malaysians are fluent in both Bahasa Malaysia and English, and use both languages in their daily lives. The diversity of languages in Malaysia reflects the country's rich cultural heritage, as well as its history of colonialism and migration. Consequently, language is a significant aspect of Malaysian identity, and the ability to speak multiple languages is frequently regarded as a valuable skill.

Despite English's status as a second language (L2) in the Malaysian education system's primary and secondary schools, there are a variety of English proficiency levels because students originate from diverse backgrounds. Students who are regularly exposed to English at home or in their community may have a higher level of proficiency in the language than those who are less exposed. Essentially, a student's natural aptitude for acquiring languages can also influence their English proficiency. Some students may have a natural aptitude for language acquisition, making it easier for them to acquire and effectively use English.

According to Brown (2000), learners have to be fairly exposed to all of the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing in order to master the English language. However, Malaysian students are still considerably weak in English, as errors are still made by the students as exhibited in their written work. For second language learners, a big problem in writing appears in the grammar of English, since writing strategies and methods have been influenced by the native language learning (Fengjie, Jia, & Hongyi, 2016). The word order of a sentence in some languages is different from English, so learners may transfer this word order to their English writing, resulting in sentences that are grammatically incorrect. Additionally, some languages have different verb tenses or aspects that may not exist in English, so learners may have difficulty understanding or using these English verb forms.

Overgeneralisation is also a common error that second language learners may make when learning English. The learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience of other structures in the target language (Richards, 1971). For example, a learner who has learned that English plurals are often formed by adding "s" to the end of a word may overgeneralise this rule and mistakenly write "childs" instead of "children" or "mans" instead of "men". Several types of errors are bound to be encountered in the learners' written performance, as making mistakes is a natural process of learning and must be considered as part of cognition (Darus, 2009). Due to this factor, errors must be viewed positively. Richards (1971) also proposed that rather than reflecting the learner's inability to separate two languages, intralingual and developmental errors reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition.

Error analysis is essential to teaching methodology because it enables the identification and explanation of learners' learning difficulties. Through error analysis, educators can identify the most common categories of errors made by students as well as their underlying causes. This can help educators develop appropriate corrective techniques to resolve these errors and enhance the English comprehension and usage of their students. Educators can also use Error Analysis (EA) to evaluate the efficacy of their teaching methods and materials, and to adapt their lessons based on their students' requirements and progress. The application of EA and

appropriate corrective techniques can facilitate effective English learning and instruction (Darus, 2009). This leads to the following objective of the research:

- To investigate the types of errors made by Malaysian university students in their written work

This study will contribute to the comprehension of how interference from the native language influences second language (L2) acquisition. It intends to highlight the specific grammatical errors that learners are likely to commit due to interference from their native language. Understanding these errors made by the students can lead to the development of instructional materials and exercises designed to address these difficulties. Language is a fundamental aspect of culture, and addressing language barriers can improve intercultural comprehension and communication. This may have broader social implications, such as increased cultural sensitivity and community cooperation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Errors versus Mistakes***

Learning a language entails being fluent in the four language skills, and mistakes are an unavoidable part of the process. Neither the educator nor the student should become overly concerned with them. However, it is beneficial for both to understand the various types of common errors in written English, as these are the most easily corrected. In EA, the concept of error has a distinct connotation that differs from that of "mistake." Corder (1981) distinguishes clearly between 'errors' and 'mistakes'. Errors, he claims, are "failures of incompetence," whereas mistakes are "failures in performance." Errors are systematic, unlike mistakes, because they represent language learners' underlying linguistic understanding. Competence errors typically result from a lack of knowledge, while performance errors are errors associated with performance issues, such as negligence and fatigue (Chomsky, 1969). On the basis of the previously mentioned data, it appears possible to assert that mistakes do not occur systematically and are the result of physical, emotional, or psychological factors, whereas errors occur systematically and are the result of a lack of knowledge, not from other external factors. Learners' slips of the tongue or pen are considered 'mistakes' rather than 'errors' if they are self-corrected, i.e. without external assistance, but 'errors' if they are not. Regardless of what has been discussed regarding the distinctions between errors and mistakes, Ellis (1997) observes that it may not always be possible to make a clear distinction between them.

### ***2.2 Error Analysis***

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), EA was first established by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the late 1970s and became a very popular approach for describing L2 errors (Al-Khresheh, 2016). This approach makes no assumptions about the reasons for the types of errors; rather, it prescribes collecting data from the actual conversations of language learners and then classifying the categories of errors based on the collected data (Burt, 1975). Error analysis can be described as observing students' errors, categorising them in accordance with a particular system, and analysing them accordingly (Bölükbaş, 2011). As shown in Figure 1 below, many definitions of the methodology were also provided by second language researchers in accordance with the expansion of EA-based research.

<b>Linguist</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Corder (1981, p. 35)	An experimental technique for validating the theory of transfer aims at telling us something about the psycholinguistic processes of language learning.
Ellis, (1985, p. 296)	A procedure used by both researchers and teachers. It involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their hypothesized causes, and evaluating their seriousness.
Selinker and Gass (2008, p. 517)	A procedure for analysing second language data that begins with the errors learners make and then attempts to explain them.
Crystal, (2008, p. 173)	A technique for identifying, classifying and interpreting systematically the unacceptable forms produced by someone in learning a second language, using the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.
VanPatten and Benati (2010, p. 82)	A research tool characterized by a set of procedures for identifying, describing, and explaining L2 learners' errors.
James, (2013, p. 1)	A process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language.

Figure 1: Definitions of the methodology

There are numerous classifications in the literature that explain and evaluate errors according to their categories and sources. Corder (1973, 1975) divides errors into four groups: lacking a basic unit (1), adding an irrelevant or unnecessary unit (2), selecting the incorrect unit (3), and misordering the units (4). He adds that it is preferable to classify errors according to different categories, such as spelling, phonologic, morphologic, and syntactic categories. In order to analyse surface structure errors, Dulay et al. (1982) suggest categorising them as "misinformation, omission, addition, and misordering."

Richards and Schmidt (2010) classify errors as intralingual and interlingual in their most fundamental sense. While interlingual errors result from transference from the learner's native language, intralingual errors are influenced by various linguistic factors.

### ***2. 3 Interlingual versus Intralingual Errors***

Interlingual and intralingual errors are the two most common categories of errors made by L2 learners. Early phases of second-language acquisition are characterised by a substantial amount of interlingual transfer from the native language. According to Brown (1980), before the learner becomes familiar with the system of the second language, the only linguistic system from which the learner can draw is the native language.

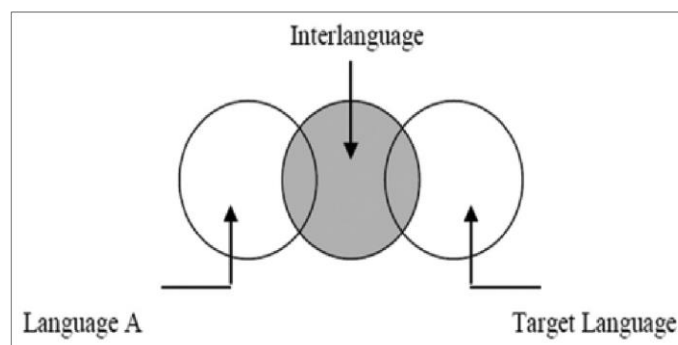


Figure 2: Diagram of Interlanguage (Source: Corder, 1981,p.17)

Contrarily, intralingual error or intralingual transfer refers to the negative transfer of language items within the target language and typically occurs during the rule learning stages of language acquisition, such as the overgeneralization of grammar rules within the target language and the failure to apply rules of the target language in appropriate situations. Richards (1971) suggests four categories of intralingual errors: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and the building of false systems. Firstly, overgeneralization occurs when a learner extends the use of a grammatical rule beyond its accepted usage. The second instance of the learner's ignorance of rule restriction is when he fails to comprehend that the existing rule is limited to a particular context and should therefore not be applied in other contexts. For example, he writes “*They didn't can come early*” rather than “*They couldn't come early*” after a modal verb. In this instance, the rule is incorrectly applied because the learner believes that the modal verb *can* is similar to action verbs such as *didn't eat*, *didn't sleep*, *didn't run*, etc. The third intralingual error - incomplete application of rules - occurs when learners fail to learn the more complex types of structures because they can easily use basic forms to communicate, for example, “*You speak English?*” instead of “*Do you speak English?*”. The fourth category is the construction of false systems, which occurs when language learners do not comprehend the system of the target language.

Various researchers have conducted studies on L1 interference in the writing of second-language English learners. Tse (2014) conducted a study to identify the grammatical errors made by university students and to suggest methods to prevent them. Six significant errors were discovered, which were singular/plural, articles, prepositions, adjective/noun, subject-verb agreement, and tenses. Sadiyah and Royani (2019) analysed students' grammatical errors in their writing, particularly in descriptive text. In the research findings, 41% of the errors in verb agreement were attributed to the incorrect use of simple present tense, followed by errors in pronoun usage (18%), usage (15%), sentence pattern (12%), orthography (9%), and capitalisation (5%). Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined errors in 72 essays written by secondary school students in Malaysia. This study sheds light on how students internalise the norms of the target language, in this case, English.

In a study conducted by Puspita (2021), morphological errors and syntactical errors were found to be the most troublesome areas of language that students encountered when writing in English. It was also stated that students tend to employ grammar rules from their first language (L1), Indonesian. Zhang (2023) conducted a case study to investigate the influences of L1 on the aspect of writing in L2; it is a qualitative case study that reveals how the Chinese language as L1 influences writing in English (L2) in the context of IELTS writing exercises as part of practice exams. His findings disclosed a wide variety of errors or misuses in L2 writing, all of which demonstrated a connection to the interference or transfer of L1 to L2 writing in terms of

grammar, semantics, and syntax. Despite the fact that the focus of these studies varies, they all reach the conclusion that L1 interference is one of the challenges learners encounter, which consequently contributed to their writing errors.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### ***3.1 Research Design***

To examine grammatical errors in academic compositions, the present study took a qualitative approach by analysing contents of the said document. This agrees with Creswell's (2009) assertion that social or human problems can be explored and understood through this research approach. One research method that qualitative research can take according to Creswell (2009) is text analysis- this was the method that the study employed. In the context of the study, the qualitative approach has enabled students' ungrammatical usage of the features (discussed at length in the findings and discussion section) to be scholarly studied and examined.

#### ***3.2 Materials***

To observe the grammatical errors committed by students, 29 academic compositions in the form of expository essays, written by diploma students, were examined via content analysis. With a focus on a topical issue, the students were tasked with producing in-class essays between 250 and 300 words, on the consequences of procrastination on students, within the duration of one hour and a half without referring to any sources including dictionary or class notes. The mean length of the 29 compositions was 305 words. The number of compositions collected was deemed sufficient for an in-depth analysis of the grammatical errors committed by the students.

#### ***3.3 Sampling Technique***

The study employed convenience sampling technique by analysing Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Puncak Perdana students' expository essays, who were undertaking the Diploma in Animation at the institution. The essays were produced as part of the assessments for a university course, ELC231 Integrated Language Skills. The students were selected on the bases of (i) convenient availability and (ii) close proximity of the researchers to the students. Offered to semester 2 students, the syllabus item equips students with necessary writing skills including higher-level grammatical construction and vocabulary expansion, to discuss topical issues effectively.

The selection of the animation students was due to the undeniable importance of writing skills in producing an animation or film, particularly when telling a story to realise one's creative designs. This includes plot and theme development, which essentially requires considerable writing skills.

#### ***3.4 Data Collection and Analysis***

In order to examine the grammatical errors committed, the researchers began by collecting the 29 academic compositions submitted by the diploma students in PDF files. The compositions were then converted into Microsoft Office word documents in order to identify the total word count and the mean or average length of the essays. The documents were then examined by two (2) English lecturers from the same institution. Through content analysis, grammatical errors were identified and classified into dissimilar categories including the use of nouns, subject-verb agreement (SVA), and copula 'be'. The classification of these errors was based on their apparent recurrence in all 29 compositions analysed.

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The researchers observed that when writing a descriptive text, most of the students regularly made singular and plural errors. Most students either added, removed, or used incorrect forms of singular and plural. The researchers discovered most mistakes were related with errors on singular and plural nouns, errors on subject-verb agreement (SVA), and errors on the use of plural and singular form in copula 'be'. Where this study is concerned, based on the students' essays, there were a total of 30 incorrect use of singular and plural nouns, 20 instances of incorrect usage of SVA, and 25 wrong productions of copula 'be'.

Table 1: Errors in Singular and Plural Nouns

Type of Errors	Frequency of Errors	Example of Errors	Example of Corrections
Singular and plural nouns	30	...there are two <u>reason</u> students postpone...	... There are two <u>reasons</u> students postpone...
		...they have stress <u>problem</u> ...	... they have stress <u>problems</u> ...
		... There are many <u>reason</u> ...	... There are many <u>reasons</u> ...
		... There are two <u>consequence</u> ...	... There are two <u>consequences</u> ...
		...students do this to <u>all subject</u> ...	...students do this to all <u>subjects</u> ...
		... <u>student</u> have to avoid themselves...	... <u>students</u> have to avoid themselves...
		...he would get <u>a bad grades</u> ...	...he would get <u>a bad grade</u> ...
		... It was stated in <u>a studies</u> ...	...It was stated in <u>a study</u> ...
		... do a given task with <u>a negative vibes</u> ...	...do a given task with <u>a negative vibe</u> ...
		... As <u>a students</u> , he should manage...	...As <u>a student</u> , he should manage...
		...In conclusion, as <u>a students</u> ...	...In conclusion, as <u>a student</u> ...

Table 1 shows the examples of students' errors in nouns. Most students made errors when indicating singular nouns or plural nouns. To illustrate, the errors found in their academic compositions include *two reason*, *many reason*, *two consequence*, and *all subject*. *Two*, *many*, and *all* precede plural nouns. Therefore, the phrases should be *two reasons*, *many reasons*, *two consequences*, and *all subjects* since *reason*, *consequence*, and *subject* belong to singular nouns.

Not to mention, another error is related to singular nouns. For example, *a bad grades*, *a studies*, *a negative vibes*, and *a students*. *A* is an article which precedes a singular noun. Therefore, the phrases should be *a bad grade*, *a study*, *a negative vibe*, and *a student* since *grades*, *studies*, *negative vibes*, and *students* belong to plural nouns.

Table 2: Errors in Subject-verb Agreement (SVA)

Type of Errors	Frequency of Errors	Example of Errors	Example of Corrections
Errors in subject-verb agreement (SVA)	20	... physical health issues that leads...	... physical health issues that lead...
		...Many people suffers...	...Many people suffer...
		... procrastination lead to consequence...	... procrastination leads to consequence...

Table 2 reveals the examples of students' errors in the Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA). Most students made errors by adding *-s* or *-es* at the end of the verb in present tense form when the subject or the entity performing the action is a plural subject. For instance, some of the errors observed in the students' writing were *physical health issues that leads* and *many people suffers*. *Leads* and *suffers* are singular verbs. Therefore, the phrases should be *physical health issues that lead* and *many people suffer* since *leads* and *suffers* belong to singular verbs. Another error is omitting *-s* or *-es* at the end of a verb in present tense form when the subject or the entity performing the action is a singular subject. One example of this error is *procrastination lead*. *Lead* is a plural verb. Therefore, the phrase should be *procrastination leads* since *leads* belongs to the singular verb. As there is a difference in the SVA rule in English and Malay (verbs in Malay do not need to agree with the number or status of the subject), the omission and addition of *-s* in sentences above therefore may be due to the interference from the learners' first language.

Table 3: Errors in the Use of Plural and Singular Form in Copula 'be'

Type of Errors	Frequency of Errors	Example of Errors	Example of Corrections
Errors in the use of plural and singular form in copula 'be'	25	...If the students <u>is</u> not doing...	...If the students <u>are</u> not doing...
		...Some students <u>is</u> having...	...Some students <u>are</u> having...
		... there <u>is</u> tons of consequences...	... there <u>are</u> ton of consequences...
		... the student <u>are</u> having overcrowded assignments...	... the student <u>is</u> having overcrowded assignments...
		... Procrastinations <u>is</u> one of those...	... Procrastinations <u>are</u> one of those...
		... Student's workflow <u>are</u> dictated	... Student's workflow <u>is</u> dictated
		... Fear of failure <u>are</u> ...	... Fear of failure <u>is</u> ...

Table 3 indicates the examples of students' errors in the use of plural and singular form in copula 'be'. The verb 'be' has three distinct present tense and two past tense forms. Most students used the wrong forms of the verb 'be'. The examples of incorrect forms of verb 'be' in the students' writing are *students is*, *procrastinations is*, and *there is tons of consequences*. *Students*, *procrastinations*, and *tons of consequences* are considered as plural subjects. Therefore, the phrases should be *students are*, *procrastinations are*, and *there are tons of*



*consequences* since *students*, *procrastinations*, and *tons of consequences* belong to plural subjects. Other examples of students' errors in copula 'be' are the *student are having*, *student's workflow are*, and *fear of failure are*. *The student*, *student's workflow* and *fear of failure* are considered as singular subjects. Therefore, the phrases should be the *student is*, *student's workflow is*, and *fear of failure is* since *the student*, *student's workflow*, and *fear of failure* belong to singular subjects.

## 5. DISCUSSIONS

According to Krashen (2013), inter and intra lingual errors cause the omission, insertion, and misinformation problems to occur. Based on the findings, it can be said that the reason why the students made the errors is due to inter and intra lingual mistakes. Not to mention, Richard (2014) argued that a mistake happens when grammatical or stylistic components from the first language are introduced into the target language. This can be seen when the majority of the students still use their mother tongue (Malay) while speaking and writing, which leads to usage errors with the singular and plural nouns and verbs. According to Hamzah and Sharifudin (2017), native language interference was the major source of preposition errors in the students' essays with 55.9% of errors.

For example, English grammar requires the subject and verb to agree in a number in which both must be singular or both must be plural. Problems occur in the present tense because one must add an *-s* or *-es* at the end of the verb when the subjects or the entity performing the action is a singular third person (*he*, *she*, *it*, or words for which these pronouns could substitute). The examples *He likes ice cream* and *She likes ice cream* exemplify this. On the other hand, in Malay grammar, there is no such thing as a subject-verb agreement rule that is based on the number of the subjects. According to Nik Safiah Karim et al. (2004), the basic sentence structures in Malay show that the number or status of the subject does not affect the verb structures in the predicates such as *Dia suka ais krim* (*He/She likes ice cream*) and *Mereka suka ais krim* (*They like ice cream*). It can be seen that the suffixes that accompany the 3rd person pronoun in English sentences are not of a concern in Malay sentences.

Another example is the existence of the varied forms of the copula 'be' in English which have multiple parallel forms in Malay: this could have contributed to the errors. The forms of copula 'be' in Malay and English are the main reason whereby one form in Malay appears in many forms in English. In Malay, the closest words which describe the relationship between the subject and the predicate are *ialah* and *adalah*. However, in English, the verb 'be' has three distinct present tense and two past tense forms (*am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were*). Due to the difficulty in the forms that the copula 'be' can appear in English, learners sometimes tend to use the incorrect forms in place of the correct ones. This study also shows that omission and wrong forms used are the two most common types. It is not surprising that this phenomenon happens because the presence of the copula 'be' is, most of the time, not essential in a Malay sentence (Nik Safiah, 1995).

## 6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that the sources of errors found by the researchers were the negative interference from the native language. This result is in accordance with Hamzah and Sharifudin's (2017) findings that indicated that students' sources of errors were negative interference from their native language and inherent difficulty of preposition use. Although not all errors are due to mother tongue interference, a large number of errors identified in the use of singular and plural nouns, subject verb agreement, and copula 'be' reflected the interference of the Malay grammar. This provides compelling evidence that interlanguage plays a crucial

role in investigating the causes of learners' errors, as well as providing researchers with an appropriate understanding of the nature of the learner's internal linguistic system and how it functions. In light of these findings, it is suggested that ESL instructors devote more classroom time to error-prone areas. Further research should also be conducted to compare the writing errors made by English language learners in Malaysia and other countries, as this will contribute to the literature by revealing the impact of the language learning environment on the type of error.

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## **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

NN wrote the introduction and literature review. NMA performed data collection and data analysis. MNA wrote the methodology and refinement. NN and MNA wrote the discussion and conclusion sections and language editing. NMA proofread and formatted the paper.

## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

We certify that the article is the researcher's original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This study has not been submitted for publication nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all authors have contributed significantly to the work for submission to the journal of creative practices in language learning and teaching (cplt).

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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

**Nasiha Binti Nasrudin** (B.Ed. TESL, M.A.) is an English language lecturer at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Shah Alam. She holds a Master's in Arts (Linguistics) from Universiti Malaya. She has published a few articles on language and second language learners rooted in her research interests in language teaching and learning.

**Nurhafeza Binti Mohd Alkir** (B.A. English for Professionals, M.A. Applied Linguistics) is an English language lecturer at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Shah Alam. She is currently doing her PhD in Teaching English as a Second Language at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris. She has published several articles on languages second language learners rooted in her research interests in language teaching and learning.

**Muhammad Nasiruddin Bin Aziz** (B. Applied Linguistics, M.A. Applied Linguistics) is an English language lecturer at Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Shah Alam. He holds a Master's in Applied Linguistics from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). He has published several articles on languages second language learners rooted in his research interests in language teaching and learning.